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Merry and bright

No shortage of gift options for young readers of all ages

By: Helen Norrie
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PICTURE BOOKS (ages 1-7)

The Day Santa Stopped Believing in

Harold
By Maureen Fergus

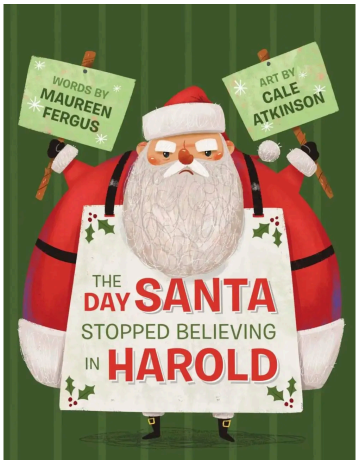
RUTH BONNEVILLE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS Eight-year-old Marley Hall reads to her little brother Johnny, 5, at the Métis Friendship Centre.

(Tundra/Penguin, 32 pages, $22, hardcover)

What if the most important question was not “Do you believe in Santa Claus?” but “Does Santa Claus believe in you?” That’s the question successful Winnipeg writer Maureen Fergus (*Invisibill, Buddy and Earl, The Gypsy King*) asks in this topical new picture book. Things are disturbed at the North Pole. Santa has a letter from Harold but he thinks Harold’s mother has written it. What if Harold really doesn’t exist? The only way to know is to hide out in Harold’s living room on Christmas Eve.

This is a funny, lively tale that will make pre-schoolers chuckle and make skeptics smile. Cale Atkinson’s pictures are large and colourful, adding to the appeal here.

Fergus is at McNally Robinson today at 2 p.m. signing her book.


WORDS BY
MAUREEN
FERGUS
ART BY
CALE
ATKINSON
THE DAY SANTA STOPPED BELIEVING IN HAROLD

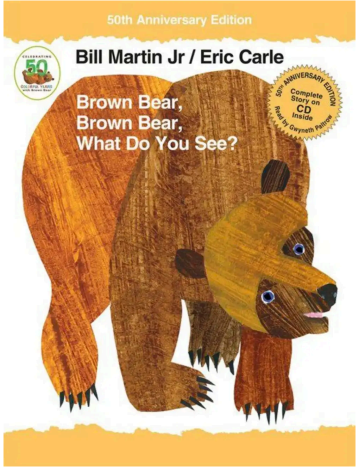
Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? The 50thAnniversary Edition

By Bill Martin Jr., illustrated by Eric Carle (Raincoast 32 pages, $28, hardcover)

The second of two famous children’s picture books reissued by Raincoast in time for this holiday season, Bill Martin’s sparse text introduces a new animal or bird on each page. But famous artist Eric Carle’s original vibrant and colourful collages in this larger format are its most striking feature. Accompanied with a CD that is an audio recording of the text, this would make a welcome gift for earliest book-lovers (ages 1-4).

French Toast

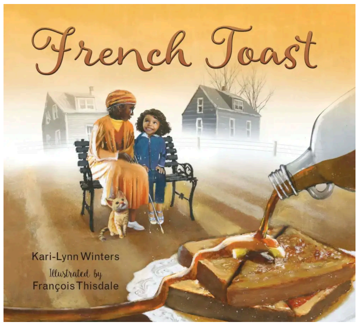
By Kari-Lynn Winters (Pajama Press, 32 pages, $20, hardcover)


50th Anniversary Edition
Bill Martin Jr / Eric Carle
Brown Bear,
Brown Bear,
What Do You See?
50th Anniversary Edition
Complete Story on CD Inside

This is a delightful picture book from an Ontario writer that celebrates the joys of diversity. Phoebe dislikes the nickname she's called at school, "French toast," reflecting her mixed heritage of French-Canadian and Jamaican backgrounds. But when her blind grandmother points out the skin colours of her family and her friends can be described as some of her favourite foods: warm banana bread, tea with milk, chocolate hazelnut spread, she realizes "French toast" can be a compliment.

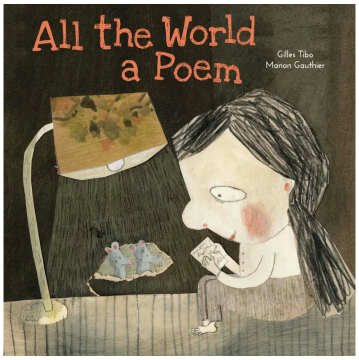
Montreal artist François Tisdale's illustrations, in warm brown colours of honey and maple syrup, help make this little book delicious.

All the World a Poem
By Gilles Tibo
(Pajama Press, 32 pages, $17, hardcover)


French Toast
Kari-Lynn Winters
Illustrated by
François Thisdale

Gilles Tibo was a well-known illustrator in Quebec before writing his first book. Now, he can boast of over 150 books which contain either his artwork or his words, or both. *All the World a Poem*, called his "tribute to poetry," was first published in French as *Poésies pour la vie*.

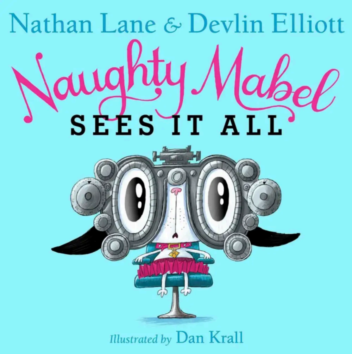
Enhanced by illustrations by Montreal artist Manon Gauthier, done in paper collage, coloured pencil and gouache, Tibo celebrates the power and freedom of poetry. He writes "Poetry is like a flower that blooms in the rain. Poetry is a mockingbird that wings me away to a land with no pain." For early readers with a love of words.



Naughty Mabel Sees it All
By Nathan Lane and Devlin Elliott
(Simon and Schuster, 48 pages, $23, hardcover)

This picture book is a fun story for 4-8 year olds. Naughty Mabel, the irrepressible bunny heroine with a habit of getting into trouble, is invited to a sleepover with her two best friends, Smarty Cat and Scaredy Cat. But bedlam occurs when Mabel mistakes chairs and clocks for monsters. Why has Mabel gone berserk? The answer is in the title.

Lane and Elliott are better known for their work in theatre and screen. Lane has frequently appeared on TV, while Elliott has been a producer of off-Broadway and West End shows. They have teamed up with Los Angeles artist Dan Krall, whose whimsical paintings add to the humour of this picture book.

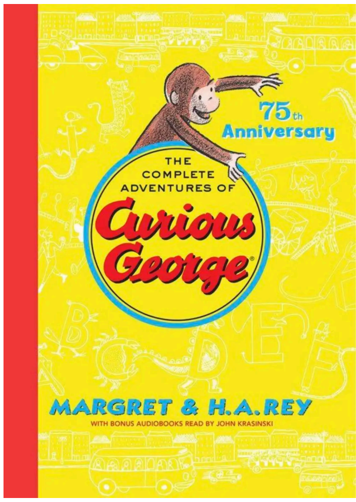


Curious George: The 75th Anniversary Edition
By H.A. Rey and Margret Rey (Raincoast Books, 64 pages, $25, hardcover)

Curious *George,* the story of a mischievous monkey, originally published in 1941, retains its original appeal. Readers 4-7 will chuckle at George's antics as he travels from his home in Africa to a big city where he accidentally calls the fire department and gets into all sorts of trouble.

Published with its original illustrations by the Reys and with a downloadable audio book to accompany it, it's a sure-fire winner.

JUVENILE NOVELS (ages 8-12)


75th Anniversary
THE COMPLETE ADVENTURES OF
Curious George
MARGRET & H.A.REY
WITH BONUS AUDIOBOOKS READ BY JOHN KRASINSKI

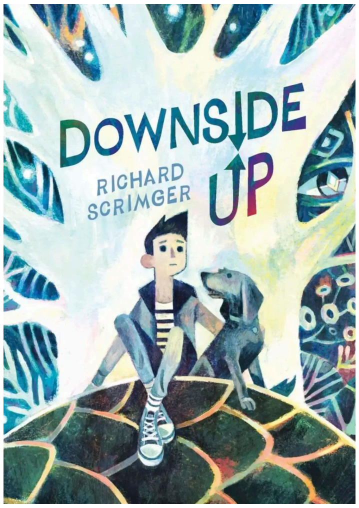
Downside Up
By Richard Scrimger
(Tundra, 272 pages, $20, hardcover)

Downside Up, like its title, is a book that juvenile readers will find hard to put down. Twelve-year-old Fred has lost his beloved dog, Casey. When Casey's old ball slips into a storm sewer, Fred climbs down to retrieve it, and finds himself in a parallel universe where down is up and where Casey is still alive.

Fred finds a family who are identical to his own — with even a different version of himself. In the process he realizes that change is inevitable and that his friends and family have qualities and feelings he has overlooked. Finally he makes an amazing discovery which Scrimger skilfully hides until the book's climax. Fred's life will never be the same again.

Absorbing, funny, thoughtful and well-written, this is a highly recommended book for this middle age group.

Raymie Nightingale By Kate DiCamillo (Candlewick Press/Random House, 263 pages, $20, hardcover)

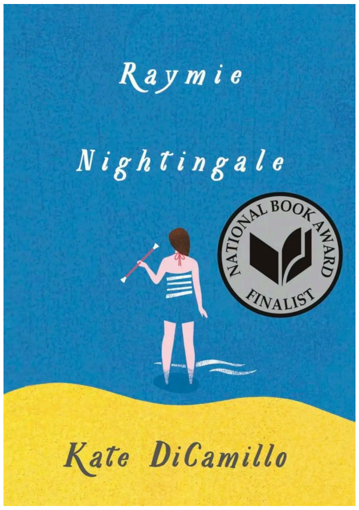


If you're looking for a "feel-good" book for ages 8-12, *Raymie Nightingale* fits the bill. The story of three 10-year-old girls, each with a problem, but also each with determination to make things better, it is both funny and memorable.

There is a contest for Little Miss Florida Central Tire with a prize of $1,975. All three girls hope to win it, but for very different reasons. Raymie hopes that fame will lure home her father, who has left to live with his dental hygienist. Louisiana needs the money to keep her and her grandmother from going to the county home. Beverley hopes to please her mother, or to be able to travel to New York to see her father. The girls become fast friends as they struggle to fulfil demands for the contest.

DiCamillo is a two-time winner of the Newbery Medal, the pre-eminent award for children’s literature. This story demonstrates her ability to get into the mind and emotions of her characters. As one says prophetically, “It will all work out right in the end.”

A Boy Called Christmas
By Matt Haig, illustrations by Yorkshire artist Chris Mould
(HarperCollins, 262 pages, $17, hardcover)

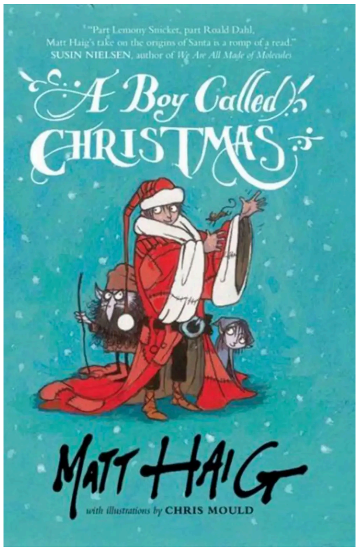


Not only is Haig's story relevant for the season, but it's a quirky, imaginative tale with surprising relevance to recent political events. Set in Finland, it follows 11-year-old Nikolas as he travels north to Elfhelm to find his father who has gone ahead to try to prove the existence of elves. He finds that the village has been taken over by a stern ruler, Father Vodol, who has banned all joy and celebration. As Vodol proclaims, "It (the old society) was a mistake. It was full of friendliness and happiness and dancing. Not important things like fear and disliking outsiders."

Nikolas manages to convince the inhabitants to return to hope and compassion as he becomes Father Christmas, bringing joy to all children on Christmas Eve. Pen and ink illustrations by Yorkshire artist Chris Mould add a sinister aspect to the text. Despite some odd passages where U.K. author Haig intrudes, readers will find this an absorbing tale of improbable adventure.

The Best Man

By Richard Peck (Penguin Canada, 232 pages, $23, hardcover)


"Part Lemony Snicket, part Roald Dahl. Matt Haig's take on the origins of Santa is a romp of a read."
SUSIN NIELSEN, author of We Are All Made of Molecules
A Boy Called CHRISTMAS
MATT HAIG
with illustrations by CHRIS MOULD

New York author Richard Peck has a whole shelf of bestselling books for young people to his credit.

In *The Best Man,* he tackles a delicate subject: a young boy's acceptance of the gay relationship of two of his favourite people, his uncle and his favourite teacher.

Peck accomplishes this undertaking with humour and sensitivity.

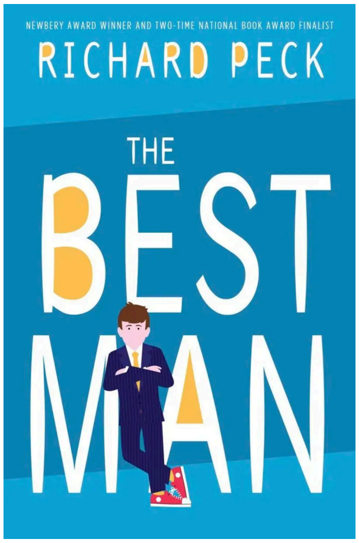
Archer Magill, the main character, is funny, candid, and intensely loyal.

This is a book that all middle-grade readers should read, and will enjoy doing so.

Snow Summer

By Kit Peel (Groundwood, 223 pages,

$17, hardcover)


NEWBERY AWARD WINNER AND TWO-TIME NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST
RICHARD PECK
THE
BEST
MAN

Snow Summer gives us a new slant on myths of climate change.

In a remote English village, summer has never arrived.

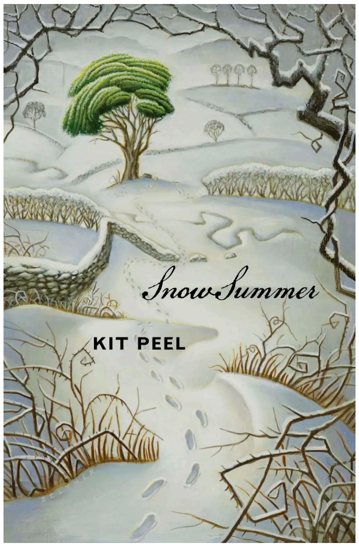
Snow covers the ground, trees are bare and birds are silent.

Wyn, a young girl, feels and sees things that others do not. When a strange barefoot farmer appears who invites her into his underground home she realizes that she must act quickly to save the world from endless winter.

Lovers of fantasy and of myth and legend will enjoy this allegorical tale of good over evil by this U.K. author.

TEEN NOVELS (12 and up)

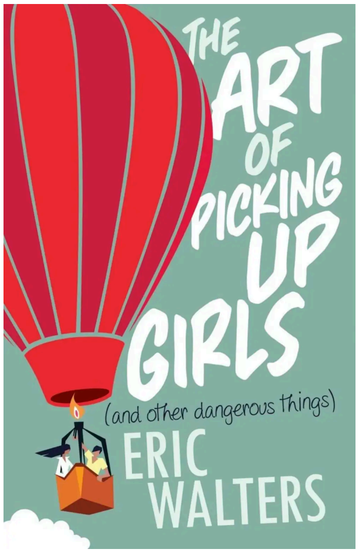
The Art of Picking Up Girls
By Eric Walters



(RazorBill/Penguin, 272 pages, $15, paperback)

It is hardly debatable that Toronto author Eric Walters is the most successful writer for teens and pre-teens in Canada today. With over 90 novels, 120 awards, and his books in 13 languages, he has a record that is hard to beat. *The Art of Picking Up Girls* does not disappoint. Graham's family has just relocated from a small town to a big city as he enters his senior year in high school. When Ethan is assigned as his mentor he has no idea of the wild ride that's ahead of him. Ethan has a million ways to meet girls and teaches Graham his methods. But his one mantra: never get serious, is one rule Graham finally has to break.

Walters' plot is creative and humorous; his characters are appealing and refreshing. This is one teen novel that is sure to please.

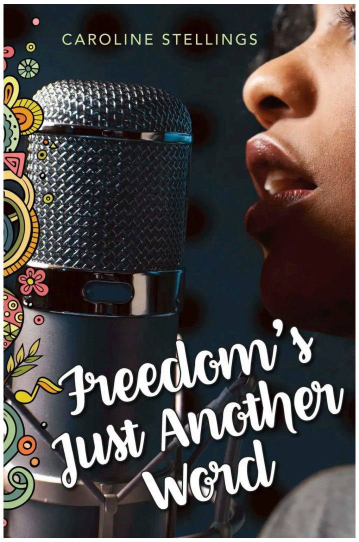


Once in a Town Called Moth
By Trilby Kent
(Tundra, 224 pages, $22, hardcover)

This young adult novel has an unusual main character, Ana, who has grown up in a Mennonite community in Bolivia. Ana and her father have left Bolivia hurriedly and relocated to Toronto, where Ana finds everything bewildering and unwelcoming. Luckily she meets Suvi, a hip neighbour who helps guide her through her introduction to high school, and helps her search for her mother, who left the colony when Ana was only a child.

The novel is part mystery: (Why did they have to leave Bolivia? Will she find her mother?) and largely an exploration of family values in different cultures. It will inspire thoughtful discussion. Other books by Kent, who hails from Toronto, include *Stones for My Father* and *Medina.*

Freedom's Just Another Word
By Caroline Stellings
(Second Story Press, 232 pages, $13, paperback)



This Waterdown, Ont., author paints a vivid picture of the conflict between teenage ambition and talent versus racism and prejudice as the Civil Rights movement influences both America and Canada. Louisiana ("Easy" for short) is an 18-year-old young woman of mixed racial background (black father, white mother), who loves to sing the blues working as a mechanic in her father's garage in Saskatoon in 1970. It's the year when singer Janis Joplin's Festival Express rolled across the Prairies, and Easy is determined to meet Janis. When the train stops for refills of liquor, she has a surprise encounter leading to an unexpected trip with two nuns to Austin, Texas.

Easy discovers black women face cruel treatment in Texas and has to make a

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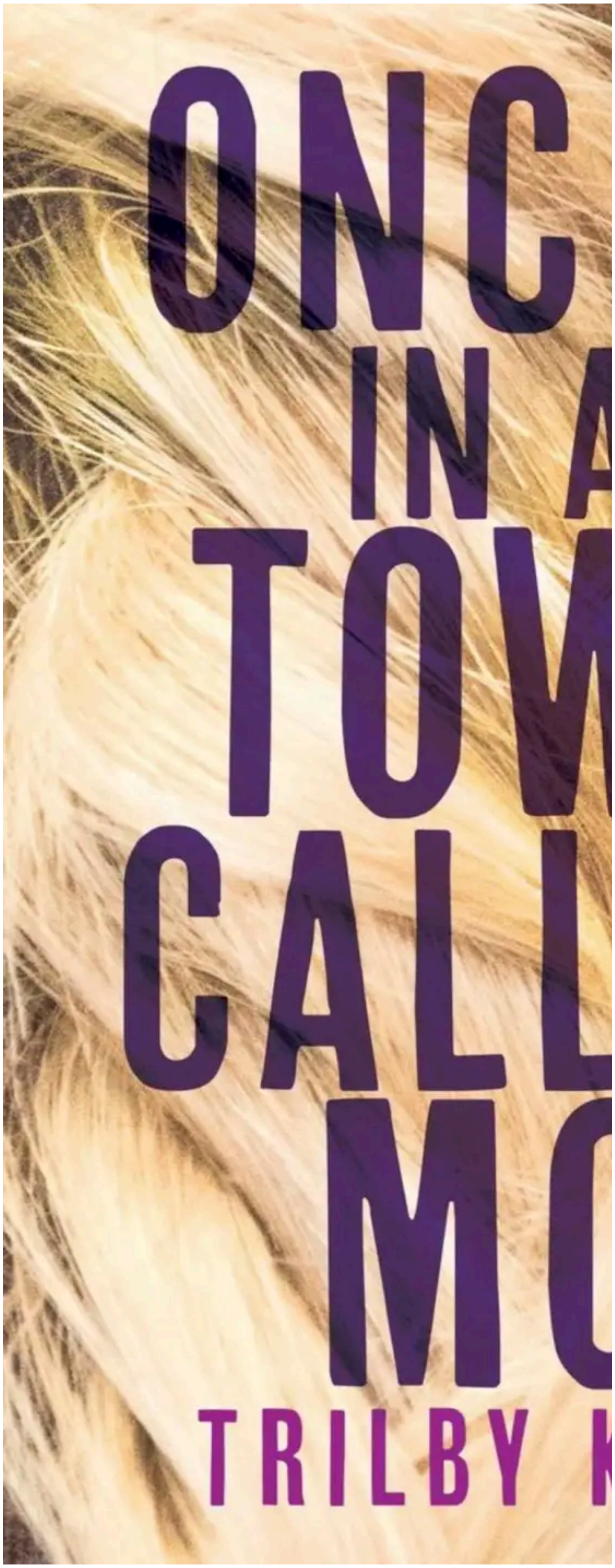
dialogue, an attractive main character, unexpected humour, and real history thrown in, this is an important book that teens will find compelling reading.

Books are gifts that keep on giving — remember that when doing your Christmas or Hanukkah shopping.

Helen Norrie is an author and former teacher who loves to read.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HISTORY

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